

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Beyond neoclassicism: symphonic form, catharsis, and political commentary in Barraine's *Deuxième symphonie* (1938)

Book Section

How to cite:

Hamer, Laura (2018). Beyond neoclassicism: symphonic form, catharsis, and political commentary in Barraine's *Deuxième symphonie* (1938). In: Mawer, Deborah ed. *Historical Interplay in French Music and Culture 1860 - 1960*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 121–138.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2018 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

PART II: French Music and Culture, 1930–1960

6 Beyond Neoclassicism: Symphonic Form, Catharsis and Political Commentary in Barraine's *Deuxième symphonie* (1938)

Laura Hamer

By the 1930s, neoclassical trends – especially of the Stravinskian variety – were very well established in France. The French preoccupation with the past had been developing throughout the later nineteenth century and increased with Stravinsky's residency in France.¹ Stravinsky's particular brand of neoclassicism did not find favour, however, with a number of intellectual young composers of the 1930s, notably those associated with La Jeune France, who regarded neoclassicism as a false path for musical modernism and were scathing in their attacks upon it. Although Elsa Barraine was not an official member of La Jeune France, she was close to several individual members, especially her friend Olivier Messiaen, and shared their doubts about the aesthetic value of Stravinskian neoclassicism. In a striking parallel to members of the group, Barraine also cultivated a highly personalized approach to composition, which drew upon human emotional responses and believed that music should serve higher spiritual goals. It could, therefore, be seen as curious that, in the period directly preceding the Second World War, she turned to symphonic form in what might be interpreted

¹ The rise of Stravinskian neoclassicism in France has been well documented. See, for example, Richard Taruskin, 'Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology', *19th-Century Music*, 16/3 (Spring 1993), 268–302; Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1988; reprinted 1996); Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring 1882–1934* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

as an act of neoclassicism. Her *Deuxième symphonie* – often considered to be one of her finest works – was composed in 1938.

Barraine's creative process was, however, always intimately associated with wider political and social events. Her *Deuxième symphonie* – entitled *Voïna* (the Russian word for 'war') – reflects her unease over the imminence of a Second World War and the rise of Nazism in neighbouring Germany. Symphonic form, with its traditional associations with political commentary and catharsis, allowed Barraine – who was of Jewish descent on her paternal side – to express her fears over the rise of anti-Semitism and the growing inevitability of conflict. This chapter explores Barraine's success at turning to a traditional form, without resorting to Stravinskian neoclassicism, and the aesthetic possibilities of symphonic writing for a part-Jewish, French composer on the eve of war.

Early Biography of Elsa Barraine (1910–99)

Despite the fact that Elsa Barraine was recognized during her own lifetime as one of the most significant composers of her generation – she was awarded the *Grand Prix de Rome* in 1929, appointed to the faculty of the Paris Conservatoire in 1952 and received a steady flow of prestigious commissions – she has now fallen into relative obscurity and her work is seldom performed. Although Odile Bourin, Pierrette Germain-David, Catherine Massip and Raffi Ourgandjian's recent joint study *Elsa Barraine, une compositrice au XXème siècle* marks a welcome step forwards in terms of academic attention,² it is still to be hoped that her music will soon undergo a similar type of reappraisal to that which benefitted her contemporary and colleague André Jolivet. Since Barraine is not currently a familiar figure within contemporary

² Odile Bourin, Pierrette Germain-David, Catherine Massip and Raffi Ourgandjian, *Elsa Barraine, une compositrice au XXème siècle* (Paris: Éditions Delatour France, 2010).

music scholarship, a brief biographical background of her career up to the outbreak of the Second World War is provided here for context.

Barraine came from a musical household. Her mother, Octavie Jeanne Boisson (1877–1964), was an amateur pianist, who also sang in the chorus of the Société des concerts du Conservatoire; her father, Mathieu Barraine (1870–1943), was the principal cellist at the Opéra de Paris.³ Barraine herself was recognized as a musical prodigy at a very young age. Her earliest musical experiences were guided by her father, who took her to his rehearsals and to performances at the Opéra. She entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of just nine (and never received any formal schooling). After taking the usual preparatory classes in *solfège* and piano, she studied composition with Paul Dukas, harmony with Jean Gallon, counterpoint and fugue with Georges Caussade and piano accompaniment with André Estyle. Barraine proved to be an exceptional student and collected an impressive roster of prizes, including *Premier prix* in harmony (1925), counterpoint and fugue (1927) and piano accompaniment (also 1927). The ultimate award arrived in 1929, when she became the fourth woman – following Lili Boulanger in 1913, Marguerite Canal in 1920 and Jeanne Leleu in 1923 – to win the *Premier Grand Prix de Rome* for her cantata *La Vierge guerrière* (based upon the life of Jeanne d’Arc), at the remarkably young age of only nineteen.⁴

³ For detailed consideration of Elsa Barraine’s biography, see Pierrette Germain-David, ‘Repères biographiques’, in Odile Bourin, Pierrette Germain-David, Catherine Massip and Raffi Ourgandjian, *Elsa Barraine, une compositrice au XXème siècle* (Paris: Éditions Delatour France, 2010), 11–25.

⁴ On the female winners of the interwar *Prix de Rome* competition, see Laura Hamer, ‘Negating Gender Politics and Challenging the Establishment: Women and the Prix de Rome, 1919–1939’, *Women’s History*, 70 (Autumn 2012), 4–12. (Jeanne Leleu was one of the two young pianists who had premiered Ravel’s *Ma mère l’Oye* at the opening concert of the Société musicale indépendante in April 1910. [Ed.]

Although Barraine was not very happy during her time at the Villa Médicis (1929–31) – describing it as a ‘rats’ nest’ and complaining of her small and ‘not very clean’ room, in a letter to her teacher and mentor, Dukas, back in Paris, in early 1930⁵ – it is undeniable that winning the *Prix de Rome* competition was extremely important in facilitating her career development. It brought her opportunities for performances of her work and also attention from the press. Following her return to Paris, Barraine quickly consolidated her reputation as one of the leading composers of the younger generation with her orchestral compositions. Her symphonic poem *Harald Harfagar*, after Heinrich Heine, composed in 1928, was premiered by the Orchestre Walter Straram in 1931, while her one-act comic-opera, *Le Roi bossu*, on a libretto by Albert Carré, composed as an *envoi de Rome*, was produced at the Paris Opéra-Comique in 1932.⁶

Barraine’s lifelong interests in political activism were also established during the 1930s. Her political ideologies are of central importance to various works dating from this decade, including the *Deuxième symphonie*. Having watched the ascent of fascism in Italy with unease, during her sojourn at the Villa Médicis in Rome, she was much unsettled by observing its emergence in Germany, with the rise to power of the Nazi Party (National Socialist German Workers’ Party) in the early 1930s. Her desire to take a stand against fascism motivated her to join the French Communist Party (*Parti communiste français*, PCF), following the Munich Agreement of September 1938. On a musical level, her ideological commitment to Communism stimulated an interest in folk music and popular songs. It also

⁵ Elsa Barraine, letter to Paul Dukas (6 February 1930), Bibliothèque nationale de France (Département de musique). All translations from the original French, unless otherwise acknowledged, are by the current author.

⁶ Raffi Ourgandjian, ‘Création et composition’ in Odile Bourin, Pierrette Germain-David, Catherine Massip and Raffi Ourgandjian, *Elsa Barraine, une compositrice au XXème siècle* (Paris: Éditions Delatour France, 2010), 48.

led her to work with popular choruses and to publish several collections of arrangements and orchestrations of popular songs.⁷

Beyond her activities as a composer, Barraine found plentiful work through the 1930s as a piano accompanist and private music teacher, as well as via broadcasting. Immediately upon her return from Rome in 1931, she was engaged as piano accompanist for the Chœurs Félix Raugel, while from 1935 to 1940 she worked for the Orchestre national (which had been established in 1934) as their Head of Singing. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Barraine left Paris for Rennes with the orchestra, though the bombing of Rennes then forced the orchestra's disbanding in June 1940. When the Orchestre national was re-established under the Vichy government in Marseille in 1941, Jewish musicians and others deemed 'undesirable' were excluded: Barraine was amongst these. On her return to Paris, she therefore supported herself through the remainder of the war via her previous range of musical activities, including teaching and accompaniment, also working for the Opéra-Comique from 1942.⁸

Barraine's Aesthetic: La Jeune France versus Neoclassicism

Barraine's musical aesthetics show a number of striking similarities to those of La Jeune France, despite its membership having been restricted to Messiaen, Jolivet, Yves Baudrier and Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur. As is well known, La Jeune France directly opposed the

⁷ Germain-David, 'Repères biographiques', 17.

⁸ Germain-David, 'Repères biographiques', 16–18. After the liberation of France, Barraine rejoined the Orchestre national as a sound engineer and worked as Musical Director for Chant du monde. In 1952, she was appointed to the faculty of the Paris Conservatoire as a professor of sight-reading and, in 1969, she replaced Messiaen (on his recommendation) as professor of analysis. She continued to compose prolifically into old age.

dominant musical trends and aesthetics that had immediately preceded them.⁹ The group's manifesto clearly articulated their revisionist and spiritual aesthetic:

As the conditions of life become more and more hard, mechanical and impersonal, music must bring ceaselessly to those who love it its spiritual violence and its courageous reactions. *La Jeune France*, reaffirming the title once created by Berlioz, pursues the road upon which the master once took his obdurate course. [...] *La Jeune France* proposes the dissemination of works [which are] youthful, free, as far removed from revolutionary formulas as from academic formulas.

The tendencies of this group will be diverse; their only unqualified agreement is in the common desire to be satisfied with nothing less than sincerity, generosity and artistic good faith. Their aim is to create and to promote a living music.¹⁰

As Barbara Kelly has recently observed, *La Jeune France* 'established a distinct identity for their group in opposition to aspects of neoclassicism, which had dominated French music'.¹¹ The associated composers were scathing in their attacks on neoclassicism,

⁹ See, in particular, Nigel Simeone, 'La Spirale and La Jeune France: Group Identities', *The Musical Times*, 143 [No. 1880] (Autumn 2002), 10–36.

¹⁰ Boston Symphony Orchestra, 56th Season (1936–37), Second Programme (16 and 17 October 1936), Programme Book, 74. This text is taken from the English translation of *La Jeune France*'s manifesto as it appeared in the programme notes for the American premiere of Messiaen's *Les Offrandes oubliées* given by the Boston Symphony Orchestra (16 and 17 October 1936). Their manifesto had previously been distributed (in French) at the group's first concert at the Salle Gaveau on 3 June 1936, and had been published in *Beaux-Arts* (5 June 1936).

¹¹ Barbara L. Kelly, *Music and Ultra-Modernism in France: A Fragile Consensus, 1913–1939* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 115.

regarding it as a sterile misdirection in the search for a path to true musical modernism. In a fierce polemic entitled ‘Contre la paresse’ (‘Against Laziness’), published in *La Page musicale* in March 1939, for instance, Messiaen raged: ‘Lazy: the fake Couperin maniacs, writers of rigadoons and pavans. Lazy: the odious contrapuntalists of the “return to Bach” who offer us, without remorse, dry and doleful lines poisoned by a semblance of atonality.’¹² Members of La Jeune France also reacted against the art-and-the-everyday aesthetic of Les Six, and, what appeared to them, to be the increasingly mechanical music of the 1920s.¹³

In their conscious desire to reject the dominant musical aesthetics and previous trends, these composers sought to reconnect to an older tradition by reinstating Debussy and Romanticism. They promoted a personalized approach to composition and, whilst also stressing the inherent passion and sensuality of music, fostered the belief that music should serve higher, spiritual goals. In his prewar journalistic writings, Messiaen frequently expressed his belief in music’s spiritual purpose (see also Chapter 11). In an article for *La Page musicale* of February 1937 that echoed La Jeune France’s manifesto, Messiaen declared that the best type of religious music was a ‘living’ music: ‘Living through its subject, living through its language. The word “life” recurs constantly in the Gospels [...] and all Christians aspire towards eternal life [...] The language of the musician-believer will thus try to express life. This life [...] calls for powerfully original and varied means of expression.’¹⁴ In a similar

¹² Olivier Messiaen, ‘Contre la paresse’, *La Page musicale* (17 March 1939), 1; reproduced and trans. in Stephen Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism 1935–1939* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 129–30.

¹³ It is curious to note in passing that a former member of Les Six – Germaine Tailleferre – actually helped to launch La Jeune France, with Ricardo Viñes performing her First Piano Concerto, a strongly neoclassical work, at their inaugural concert on 6 June 1936.

¹⁴ Olivier Messiaen, ‘Musique religieuse’, *La Page musicale* (5 February 1937), 1; reproduced and trans. in Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 125.

vein, he stressed the need to support sacred music in *Carrefour*: ‘Let us promote “true” music at last, sacred music, which is firstly and above all an act of faith.’¹⁵ Messiaen’s expression of his Roman Catholic faith and Jolivet’s explorations of his pagan beliefs through music are probably the most famous examples of the spiritual aspects of La Jeune France’s musical aesthetics. The group also, of course, promoted orchestral music.

For her part, Barraine also produced a steady output of orchestral music, as reflected in the *Deuxième symphonie*, amongst other works. And in her music, that personalized approach to composition was evident since most major works were written in direct response to wider cultural, social and political events. Françoise Andrieux and Paul Griffiths have previously commented that, ‘profoundly sensitive to the enormous upheavals of her time, Barraine was unable to dissociate her creative processes from her personal, humanist and social preoccupations’.¹⁶ The parallel between Barraine and Jolivet – in that the works of both composers tended to be intimately connected to contemporary events (Jolivet even turned back to tonality during the Second World War so that he could communicate his wartime experiences) – is especially marked. Such spirituality was also central to Barraine’s output. As Ourgandjian has observed, ‘Barraine’s spiritual stance responds to a search for the Absolute. Her whole life long she yearned, through sacred texts, poetry and philosophy, for transcendence in being and thought.’¹⁷

¹⁵ Olivier Messiaen, ‘De la musique sacrée’, *Carrefour* (June–July 1939 [double issue]), 75; reproduced and trans. in Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 136.

¹⁶ Françoise Andrieux and Paul Griffiths, ‘Elsa Barraine’, in Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuel (eds.), *The Grove Dictionary of Woman Composers* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 38–9: 38.

¹⁷ Raffi Ourandjian, ‘L’Attitude spirituelle: L’Exemple de *Musique rituelle*’ in Odile Bourin, Pierrette Germain-David, Catherine Massip and Raffi Ourgandjian, *Elsa Barraine, une compositrice au XXème siècle* (Paris: Éditions Delatour France, 2010), 57: ‘L’attitude spirituelle d’Elsa Barraine répond à une recherche de l’Absolu.

Musical exploration of Jewish spirituality and cultural identity, in particular, are present in a number of her works. *Deux préludes et fugues pour orgue*, written in 1928 and dedicated to Dukas, is based upon the melodies of the traditional Jewish prayer ‘Blessed are you, our God’ and Psalms 114 and 116. Jewish musical and cultural identity are also explored in *Trois chansons hébraïques enfantines*, first performed by the Orchestre national on 20 February 1935, and *Quatre chants juifs*, premiered by the Orchestre Colonne on 18 December 1937. Writing in *La Syrinx*, Messiaen described *Quatre chants juifs* as ‘Very lively, very fanciful. A kind of nostalgic weariness pierces through now and again.’¹⁸ (Such reference to ‘nostalgia’ by Messiaen certainly supports the idea of an elusive historical interplay for Barraine, operating through the tradition of faith, amongst other dimensions.) Jewish identity and a fear of the rise of fascism and anti-Semitism are also both central to *Pogromes* (1933), a symphonic poem inspired by André Spire (discussed further below). Since Jolivet’s pagan and Messiaen’s Roman Catholic sacred music is often seen as exemplifying La Jeune France’s spiritual tendencies of the later 1930s, we might usefully view Barraine’s contemporaneous Jewish-inspired sacred and spiritual compositions as an extension of this music-aesthetic trend.

A shared partially Jewish background formed a really important bond between Barraine and Dukas, who was also of Jewish descent on his paternal side. In common with many of his students, Barraine always acknowledged the strong formative influence that Dukas had upon her, which extended far beyond pure musical composition to embrace culture, arts, aesthetics and philosophy. Following Dukas’s death in May 1935, *La Revue*

Tout au long de sa vie elle aspire, à travers les textes sacrés, la poésie, la philosophie, à la transcendance de l’être et sa pensée.’

¹⁸ Olivier Messiaen, ‘Billet parisien’, *La Syrinx* (January 1938), 19–20; reproduced and trans. in Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 98.

musicale planned a ‘Tombeau’ in his honour. In response to a letter from Henry Prunières (editor-in-chief of *La Revue musicale*; see too Chapter 5) – asking for advice about which of Dukas’s former pupils might be invited to contribute – Messiaen recommended Barraine first, opining that she was ‘perhaps the most fervent of all the master’s disciples’.¹⁹ Barraine’s ‘Hommage à Paul Dukas’ appeared in the *Tombeau de Paul Dukas* which *La Revue musicale* published as a musical supplement to their May–June 1936 issue, alongside contributions from Messiaen, Julien Krein, Florent Schmitt, Guy Ropartz, Manuel de Falla, Joaquín Rodrigo, Tony Aubin and Gabriel Pierné.²⁰

Barraine’s spiritual music was not, however, restricted to Judaism. In another parallel to La Jeune France, she was fascinated by the music of other cultures, and in engaging with these as a means to reconnect with spirituality and human emotional responses. As Kelly has commented, La Jeune France often drew ‘inspiration from other musical cultures in order to rediscover the fundamental spiritual and human emotional responses, which they deemed to be lacking in contemporary music’.²¹ Barraine wrote a handful of works inspired by Eastern religions and philosophies, especially Buddhism.²² It was Dukas who first inspired her life-long interest in Eastern philosophy and culture. He introduced her to the ancient Hindu poem, the *Bhagavad Gita*, which she copied out by hand during her stay at the Villa Médicis and which had a profound influence upon her in the early 1930s. Beyond her interests in Judaic

¹⁹ Olivier Messiaen to Henry Prunières (undated letter); cited in Nigel Simeone, ‘Messiaen in the 1930s: *Offrandes oubliées*’, *The Musical Times*, 141 [No. 1873] (Winter 2000), 33–41: 37.

²⁰ *Le Tombeau de Paul Dukas*, *La Revue musicale* [Musical supplement], 17/166 (May–June 1936).

²¹ Kelly, *Music and Ultra-Modernism in France*, 115.

²² Elsa Barraine, *Musique rituelle* (1967), based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead (*Bardo Thödol*) is a notable later example.

and Eastern philosophy, Barraine also produced a significant body of Roman Catholic sacred music, the religion of her maternal family.²³

The similarities between Barraine's aesthetics and musical priorities and those of La Jeune France are most likely not coincidental: Barraine and Messiaen met in Gallon's harmony class at the Paris Conservatoire in 1925; later they were famously class-mates in Dukas's 1927 composition class. They formed a distinctive friendship group with their fellow class-mate, Claude Arrieu (1903–90), and together arranged a number of joint concerts of their works (also including pieces by Jean Carton, a fellow Conservatoire student who had died tragically young at the age of only twenty-five in 1932), referring to themselves as *Les Quatre* in 1933.²⁴ Messiaen – who was remarkably astute when it came to promoting his own music and that of his friends²⁵ – approached the conductor Roger Désormière (1898–1963) on the group's behalf in June 1933. Although Désormière was soon to become a keen promoter of Messiaen and Barraine, the meeting on this occasion was disappointing, as his fees were beyond their reach.²⁶ In a letter to Arrieu, recounting the outcome of this frustrating appointment, Messiaen consoled her (and presumably himself) with his belief that:

Since we are four genuine talents, let's keep looking, collect our thoughts and write our masterpieces. Then it will be the sheer beauty of our ideas which gets us noticed; and if it

²³ Her Roman Catholic sacred works include the cantatas *Les Cinq Plaies* (1952), after a poem by Michel Manoll; *Cantate du Vendredi Saint* (1955), after a poem by Pierre Emmanuel; and *Christine* (1959), after a poem by Jules Supervielle.

²⁴ Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone, *Messiaen* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 47.

²⁵ For instance, he programmed and performed Barraine's *Deux pièces* for piano at a concert of La Spirale on 26 March 1936.

²⁶ Simeone, 'Messiaen in the 1930s: *Offrandes oubliées*', 35.

doesn't, at least we'll have had the satisfaction of doing something important [...] I have seen Barraine who will, I think, be of the same opinion [...] You know in what esteem I hold my three fine comrades.²⁷

Messiaen's plans for *Les Quatre*, of course, predate his better-known later involvement in the composer-groups *La Spirale* and *La Jeune France*.

Stephen Broad has observed Messiaen's prewar tendency to use his journalism to promote 'the music of Jean Langlais, Georges Dandelot, Elsa Barraine, André Jolivet, Georges Migot, Daniel-Lesur – all of whom were good friends – and that of his first wife, Claire Delbos'.²⁸ For example, in a review written for *La Syrix* in January 1938, Messiaen described the Scherzo and Finale of Barraine's *Première symphonie* as 'truly remarkable, full of melodic ideas'. In the same review he described her *Fantaisie concertante* for piano and orchestra as 'a particularly happy piece of orchestration [...] A great emotion is expressed (something so rare these days!) [...] It finished with a perpetual motion tutti, of remarkable spirit and personality'.²⁹ The promotion was mutual; Messiaen also benefitted from Barraine's journalistic support. For instance, in an article on Messiaen written for *L'Art musical populaire* in April 1939 – a large part of which was taken up by an interview with the composer, in which he voiced once again his distaste for the contemporary vogue for neoclassicism – Barraine declared her profound admiration for her friend and colleague:

²⁷ Olivier Messiaen, letter to Claude Arrieu (21 June 1932); reproduced and trans. in Simeone, 'Messiaen in the 1930s: *Offrandes oubliées*', 35.

²⁸ Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism*, 7.

²⁹ Messiaen, 'Billet parisien', 19–20.

Messiaen, young composer of thirty, professor at the Schola [Cantorum], organist at the Trinité, is one of the founders of the group *Jeune France*, which presents us each year with concerts consecrated to new works of the four friends of which it consists: Messiaen, Jolivet, Lesur, Baudrier.

Messiaen has already written many important works. The originality of his language is evident; harmonic and rhythmic audacity is allied to attempts to return to the melodies of the Far East, and also to the choice of texts which, incidentally, he often composes himself, and for which he draws his inspiration from mysticism, or from a touching ‘poeticization’ of family joys.³⁰

As is evident, Barraine was definitely part of Messiaen’s wider circle and La Jeune France’s aim to produce music that brought ‘ceaselessly to those who love it its spiritual violence and its courageous reactions’ is very strongly embodied in two of Barraine’s large-scale orchestral works: *Pogromes* and the *Deuxième symphonie*.

³⁰ Elsa Barraine, ‘Tribune des musiciens d’après-guerre – Olivier Messiaen’, *L’Art musical populaire. Bulletin de la Fédération musicale populaire*, 16 (April 1939), 1–2; Fonds Elsa Barraine, Bibliothèque nationale de France (press clipping, n.p): ‘Messiaen, jeune compositeur de trente ans, professeur à la Schola, organiste à la Trinité, est l’un des fondateurs du groupe “Jeune France” auquel nous devons chaque année la primeur d’un concert consacré aux œuvres nouvelles des quatre amis le composant: Messiaen, Jolivet, Lesur, Baudrier.

Messiaen a écrit déjà beaucoup d’œuvres importantes. Son originalité de langage est évidente; l’audace harmonique et rythmique y est alliée à des essais de retour à la mélodie extrême-orientale et aussi le choix des textes qu’il compose souvent lui-même d’ailleurs, et dont il puise la source dans le mysticisme, ou dans une touchante “poétisation” des bonheurs familiaux.’

For further discussion of the Popular Front, see Christopher Moore, ‘Socialist Realism and the Music of the French Popular Front’, *The Journal of Musicology*, 25/4 (Fall 2008), 473–502. [Ed.]

***Pogromes* (1933) as a Symphonic Precursor**

Barraine's fears and concerns over the highly topical ascent of anti-Semitism and fascism were first expressed in musical terms in *Pogromes*, a composition of 1933 which functions as an important precursor for the *Deuxième symphonie. Pogromes. Ouverture. Illustration symphonique d'après André Spire*, to give it its full title, was indeed inspired by a poem by the Jewish poet and writer, André Spire (1868–1966), who was politically active in attempting to protect and promote the rights and interests of Jewish intellectuals in interwar Paris. As has already been highlighted, Barraine's creative production was always intimately bound up with her political convictions, spiritual concerns and personal emotional responses to the world around her (thus an interplay with her own epoch). *Pogromes* was composed as a direct response to the rise of Hitler, Nazism and the emergence of the Third Reich.

Spire's poem consists of two parts. The first part, 'Ecoute Israël', is an impassioned call to arms from the young Jews, against the enemies who are threatening them.³¹ The second part of the poem – which is the only section of the text treated by Barraine – gives the response of the older men, who, terrified by the prospect of a fight that they know in advance to be useless, counsel their sons to submission and resignation. From Barraine's preserved correspondence, it appears that she had initially met Spire shortly after winning the *Prix de Rome*, when he gave her a collection of his poems which included *Pogromes*. In November 1934 she wrote to Spire to invite him the premiere of *Pogromes* (as an *envoi de Rome*) which was scheduled to take place at the Institut de France on 1 December 1934:

My dear master [Maître],

³¹ It should be noted that Spire held Zionist beliefs and actively engaged in Zionist activism and propaganda.

I do not know if you will remember a young ‘Prix de Rome’ who was introduced to you by Mlle Picard, and to whom you did the honour of giving a collection of your poems. Since that day, I have spent a long time at the Villa Médicis and have already been back in France for two years. I have written a ‘symphonic illustration’ for one of your poems, *Pogromes*, which I found particularly beautiful and which was so tragically topical in August 1933.³²

The review of *Pogromes* which appeared in *Le Temps* affirmed that the audience listened to it ‘religiously’ and that it was ‘warmly applauded’.³³

Given the subsequent histories of both the Third Reich and the Third Republic, the poignancy of *Pogromes* and Barraine’s sinister presentiment are unescapable. This painful sense of foreboding in *Pogromes* is continued within the *Deuxième symphonie*.

***Deuxième symphonie* as a Landmark Work**

³² Elsa Barraine, letter to André Spire (13 November 1934); cited from the *Hommage à Elsa Barraine* Exhibition Brochure, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la musique (20 October 2011–7 January 2012), 38 (letter now held in a private collection): ‘Mon cher Maître, Je ne sais si vous vous souviendrez d’une jeune “Prix de Rome” qui vous avait été présentée par Mademoiselle Picard, et à laquelle vous aviez fait l’honneur de donner quelques recueils de vos poésies. Depuis ce jour-là, j’ai passé un long temps à la villa Médicis et de retour en France depuis 2 ans déjà, j’ai écrit une “Illustration symphonique” pour un de vos poèmes, “Pogromes”, que j’ai trouvé particulièrement beau et qui fut si tragiquement d’actualité en Août 1933.’ *Comœdia* carried an announcement of the premiere: [Uncredited article], ‘Cet après-midi sous la Coupole: L’Académie des Beaux-Arts fête des grands lauréats’, *Comœdia* (1 December 1934), 3.

³³ [Uncredited review], ‘Séance publique annuelle de l’Académie des Beaux-Arts’, *Le Temps* (2 December 1934).

Recognized as one of Barraine's most significant compositions,³⁴ Germain-David has referred to the *Deuxième symphonie* as marking a very important step in her career, describing it as 'the work of a visionary, since she announces across the three movements, the war, death [and] then the end of the nightmare'.³⁵ This suggestion of a quasi-programmatic structure is born out in the work's conventional fast–slow–fast, three-movement structure, in which the slow movement, reflecting war's most severe human consequences, takes the form of a funeral march. The *Deuxième symphonie* is an exceptionally large-scale work. It is scored for two flutes (the second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons; four French horns, three trumpets, three trombones (the third doubling bass-trombone), tuba; large-scale percussion, calling for two players, including kettledrums, bass-drum, cymbals and military tambourine, glockenspiel, harp; and a large complement of strings (twelve first violins, ten second violins, eight violas, eight cellos and six double-basses). In common with many contemporary French orchestral works, the *Deuxième symphonie* displays a characteristic fascination with timbre (which is commonly traced back at least to La Jeune France's earlier namesake relation, Hector Berlioz). To this end, and in clear sympathy with La Jeune France's focus on orchestral writing in that aforementioned tradition of Debussy and Romanticism, Barraine's orchestration is remarkably detailed and precise. She frequently makes multiple divisions of her large string forces; exploits solo woodwind writing for flute,

³⁴ Elsa Barraine, *Deuxième symphonie* (Paris: Le Chant du monde, 1948), available for consultation at the British Library. An unidentified recording of the work, conducted by Manuel Rosenthal, is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPnUkjjfpp0> (accessed 6 July 2016).

³⁵ Pierrette Germain-David, 'La Personnalité d'Elsa Barraine', in Odile Bourin, Pierrette Germain-David, Catherine Massip and Raffi Ourgandjian, *Elsa Barraine, une compositrice au XX^{ème} siècle* (Paris: Éditions Delatour France, 2010), 49: 'l'œuvre d'une visionnaire puisqu'elle annonce à travers ses trois mouvements, la guerre, la mort puis la fin du cauchemar'.

oboe and clarinet; and includes highly dramatic writing for her large-scale percussion section, especially the military tambourine.

Symphonic Form

From a formal perspective, each of Barraine's three movements is cast in typical forms associated with symphonic writing from the later eighteenth century onwards. The first movement is written in a fairly standard sonata form: its very brief, yet slow introduction ('Adagio'), scored for wind quartet, is highly reminiscent of the symphonic tradition of Haydn and Beethoven and thus exhibits a Classical-period interplay (see Example 6.1).³⁶

[INSERT Example 6.1: portrait, approx. ½ page]

Example 6.1 Barraine, *Deuxième symphonie*, I: Introduction (bars 1–4)

The woodwind continue to carry the principal melodic interest across the opening movement. Similarly, material from the slow introduction recurs at structurally significant moments within this first movement, most notably when it occurs in an extended form at rehearsal Fig. 11, before the formal recapitulation that begins at Fig. 12. A second subject ('Un poco animato', introduced at Fig. 5), which is soft, expressive, lyrical and in conventional contrast to the agitated, syncopated and much more military feeling first subject ('Allegro Moderato'), also closely recalls, expands and develops material from the introduction. The orchestration of this second subject (as shown in Example 6.2) well demonstrates Barraine's concern for precision. Oboe and clarinet solos (marked *expressif*) carry the melodic interest above multiple divided strings. The continuing presence of that

³⁶ I am tremendously grateful to Hannah Payne, who set all the music examples contained in this chapter.

ominous military tambourine mars the tranquil atmosphere, relating to the menacing mood of the entire work.

[INSERT – Example 6.2 here or soon after: portrait, three separate files (1), (2), (3), to be set as three consecutive pages, preferably starting with facing pages]

Example 6.2 Barraine, *Deuxième symphonie*, I: Second subject (Fig. 5⁺³ to Fig. 5⁺¹³)

Example 6.2 (cont.)

Example 6.2 (cont.)

A particularly long melodic line (see Example 6.3), which is prominent in the oboe, flute and upper strings, is sustained throughout the second movement, against a dissonant accompaniment. The extensive use of *sostenuto* writing, muted strings and soft dynamics, in combination with the tambourine, evokes the wider context of fear and mourning. Intriguingly this central movement resonates with aspects (including repeated dotted rhythms, chromaticism and minor modality) of the slow movement of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, composed just one year earlier in 1937, though this is likely a hermeneutic intertextuality rather than any historical sense of cause–effect, or direct ‘influence’. Lastly, the Finale adopts a straight sonata-rondo form.

[INSERT Example 6.3 here or later, if necessary to balance pages with text following preceding example: portrait, two separate files (1), (2), to be set as two consecutive pages, preferably facing]

Example 6.3 Barraine, *Deuxième symphonie*, II: Extended melodic line (Fig. 1 to Fig.1⁺⁴)

Example 6.3 (cont.)

Such substantial adoption of traditional forms across the *Deuxième symphonie* might, superficially, recall Stravinsky's compositions of the interwar period, from *Pulcinella* (1920) through to the *Symphony in C* (1938–40). Yet the perhaps surprisingly harsh sound-palette here could not be further from Stravinskian neoclassicism. Despite Barraine's usually largely tonal musical language, the *Deuxième symphonie* has a brutal, military feel, created by the atypically high degree of dissonant writing and that most effective use of percussion. If anything, Barraine's return to traditional forms more closely resembles the neoclassical works of Schoenberg, such as the *Third Quartet* (1927) or the *Piano Concerto, Op. 42* (1942), in which non-tonal music is presented within older forms.

Catharsis and Political Commentary

In light of Barraine's musical aesthetic (including its wider association with the philosophy of *La Jeune France*), her use of earlier forms in the *Deuxième symphonie*, which would on a formal level appear to connect the work to neoclassicism, may initially seem odd. When viewed from the perspective of Barraine's tendency to compose works in response to contemporary social, cultural and political events, however, the choice of symphonic form makes perfect sense. Since the time of Beethoven, the symphony has been constructed as a redemptive and cathartic genre, with composers such as Schumann, Brahms and Mahler famously contributing to this trope.³⁷ The image – stemming from Beethoven's *Third Symphony* ('Eroica') – of the tragic hero struggling against a terrible fate finally to emerge victorious is very familiar. (In fact, the inclusion of a funeral march as the slow movement in Barraine's *Deuxième symphonie* inevitably brings to mind Beethoven's precursor.) Within

³⁷ On the nineteenth-century symphonic tradition see, in particular, D. Kern Holoman (ed), *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997).

this nineteenth-century tradition, the symphony also became a vehicle through which extramusical concerns, including pertinent political events, could be played out.

So rather than being a neoclassical engagement with an older form, Barraine's *Deuxième symphonie* may be viewed as extending that nineteenth-century idea of writing a symphony as an act of purging and release, at a time of personal and national crisis. For a composer who routinely expressed her own emotions through her music, the pouring out of her horror at the rise of fascism and anti-Semitism – with their direct personal threat, due to her partly Jewish background – and her fear of impending war could be construed as an act of compositional catharsis in the Romantic vein. Given the desire of Barraine's circle – including La Jeune France – to return to the aesthetic ideals of Romanticism, this accords with, rather than disconnects from, using a traditional form. This symphony may also be read as a political commentary on contemporary and imminent events. It is not a great leap to understand the work as one of the bravest musical manifestations of anti-Nazism to predate the Second World War.

The *Deuxième symphonie* was especially well received when it was performed by the Orchestra of the BBC, under the direction of Manuel Rosenthal (1904–2003; a Jewish conductor-composer and pupil of Ravel), at the London International Festival of Contemporary Music, directly after the war, in 1946. A critic writing in *The Times* on 8 July described the work as 'a sincere and direct reflection of the mental atmosphere of 1938':³⁸ thus, very much of its own time, as well as partaking of a certain temporal interplay. A further critique from the same newspaper on 19 July identified Barraine, along with Messiaen, as amongst the most interesting composers represented on the Festival programme.³⁹ It is worth commenting that it is highly likely the work's theme would have

³⁸ [Uncredited article], 'Contemporary Music', *The Times* (8 July 1946), 6.

³⁹ [Uncredited article], 'The International Festival', *The Times* (11 July 1946), 6.

been singularly poignant to listeners within the immediate postwar context of trauma and mourning.

Barraine's Wartime Resistance Activities

Since Barraine's compositional voice was so closely aligned to the world around her, she found herself too numbed and horrified by contemporary events to compose during the years of the Occupation. Following the Liberation of France in 1944, however, she composed *Avis*, for mixed chorus and orchestra, after poetry by the Resistance poet Paul Éluard (1895–1952) in memory of Georges Dudach, who had been shot by the Germans for his involvement in Resistance activities. This large composition was followed by two more (victory-inspired) orchestral works in 1945: *Marche héroïque* and *Stalingrad*.

Barraine did not confine her anti-Nazi undertakings to musical protests, since she was also active during the Resistance.⁴⁰ Along with her fellow members of the French Communist Party, Désormière and Louis Durey, she probably initiated discussion about Resistance activity amongst musicians in 1940, although Leslie Sprout has maintained that 'the first signs of a formal Resistance organization among French musicians surfaced some twelve months later, in September 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union galvanized the PCF'.⁴¹ Barraine, Désormière and Durey became the founding members of the resultant *Comité national du Front national de la Résistance des Musiciens Français* (FNM), which fell under the general auspices of the French Communist Party's *Front national de lutte pour la liberté et l'indépendance de la France*. Barraine was charged with hosting and

⁴⁰ For a recent, authoritative study of musical life in Occupied France, which considers musicians connected to the Resistance, see Leslie A. Sprout, *The Musical Legacy of Wartime France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2013).

⁴¹ Sprout, *The Musical Legacy of Wartime France*, 22.

participating in clandestine meetings, writing the group's manifesto and reporting to Dudach.⁴² She was most likely also involved in sending false documents to Louis Sagner – a Jewish musician in hiding in the Vichy Zone – in 1943.⁴³

As a musician of Jewish descent, Barraine was taking a huge risk, as she was in danger from both the Occupying forces and anti-Semitism within France. Her own father, Mathieu Barraine, lost his position as Principal Cellist at the Paris Opéra in 1941 on account of France's new anti-Semitic laws, which removed Jews from many roles within public institutions. (Unfortunately, the loss of his job had a terrible effect on Barraine's father, plunging him into a deep depression which he did not survive. He died in Paris in September 1943.) And as noted earlier, Barraine too lost her job with the Orchestre national in 1941. She was, in fact, suspected by the authorities of being a Resistance agent, and was arrested and interrogated by the Vichy militia in the autumn of 1942. Fortunately, she was released without consequence on this occasion (although the Gestapo also attempted to track her down in 1944). The experience of arrest forced her into hiding for a period of time and to assume the name Madame Catherine, later Catherine Bonnard: the name with which she actually signed her manuscript copy of *Avís*.⁴⁴ There is still much research to be done on the wartime Resistance activities of French musicians who were actively involved in the Front national.⁴⁵

⁴² Germain-David, 'La Personnalité d'Elsa Barraine', 32.

⁴³ Germain-David, 'Repères biographique', 18.

⁴⁴ Germain-David, 'Repères biographique', 19.

⁴⁵ During the conflict, it is doubtful whether even all of the musicians involved with the Resistance network knew who each other were.

It is known, however, that Barraine – along with Désormière, Durey, Rosenthal, Henri Dutilleux, Irène Joachim and Alexis Roland-Manuel⁴⁶ – was amongst the most active.

Conclusion

Barraine's *Deuxième symphonie* can be interpreted as a powerful, yet sombre, commentary on the political context of 1938, thus of its own time. Yet, rather than being a neoclassical engagement with symphonic form, the work also fits within a much more extended temporal tradition of using the symphony as a cathartic genre. Furthermore, written as a personal response to contemporary political events, its aesthetic connects directly to the personalized, emotional and spiritual philosophy of La Jeune France. In terms of a potential future trajectory, although the symphony was written in the year before the official declaration of the outbreak of war, it can arguably be best understood in relation to other works by French composers that were written in response to the conflict, Vichy and/or the Occupation, including more well-known examples, such as Poulenc's *Figure humaine* (composed 1943), Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1940–41) or Jolivet's *Les Trois Complaintes du soldat* (1940). Over the last decade, there has been a significant amount of academic interest in the musical life of wartime France, since it was, contrary to what might reasonably be assumed, very well developed, benefitting from an actual increase in state funding. While important scholarly contributions on this intriguing period of French musical history have been made by Myriam Chimènes, Nigel Simeone, Caroline Potter and Sprout,⁴⁷ beyond some

⁴⁶ Roland-Manuel appears to have taken responsibility for disseminating their propaganda documents and for editing their clandestine Resistance journal *Musiciens d'aujourd'hui*, to which Barraine contributed. (On *Musiciens d'aujourd'hui* and the clandestine press, see also Chapter 7. [Ed.])

⁴⁷ Myriam Chimènes (ed.), *La Vie musicale sous Vichy* (Brussels: Complexe, 2001); Nigel Simeone, 'Making Music in Occupied Paris, *The Musical Times*, 147 [No. 1894] (Spring 2006), 23–50; Caroline Potter, 'French

passing acknowledgments of her Resistance involvement, Barraine's wartime music and activities have been largely overlooked. In addition to a reappraisal of her wartime works, which is long overdue, it is to be hoped that the recent renewal of interest in her within France will stimulate a wider re-evaluation of this fascinating composer within the wider musicological community.

Music and the Second World War', in Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter (eds.), *French Music since Berlioz* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 281–301; Sprout, *The Musical Legacy of Wartime France*.